



Species at Risk Profile Series: Common Nighthawk



Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

- Nighthawks are considered threatened in Canada.
- They are not a hawk - instead they look and act more like a big swallow.
- They sit still during the day, relying on their camouflage to avoid predators.
- In the evening, as it gets dark, they use their large mouth to eat insects while flying.
- Nighthawks, along with other birds that eat insects in the air, are declining faster than any other group of birds in Canada - and no one knows why.
- During their breeding display, males dive at high speed towards the ground, then pull up just in time and make a loud, low “boom” sound with their wings.
- Nighthawks don’t make a real nest - instead they lay two eggs onto the bare ground.
- Nighthawks are found across Canada and prefer open areas.
- In northern Canada, they are often found in newly burned forest.

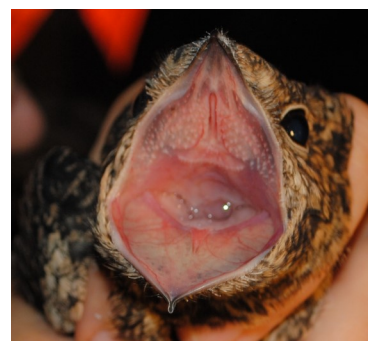
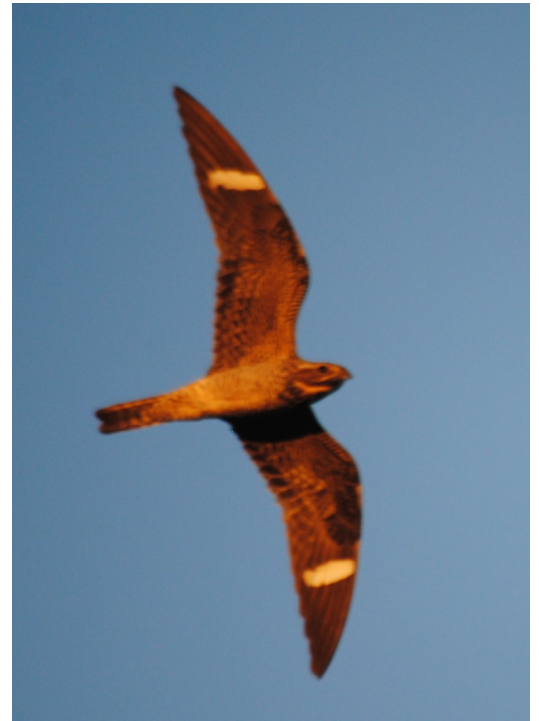
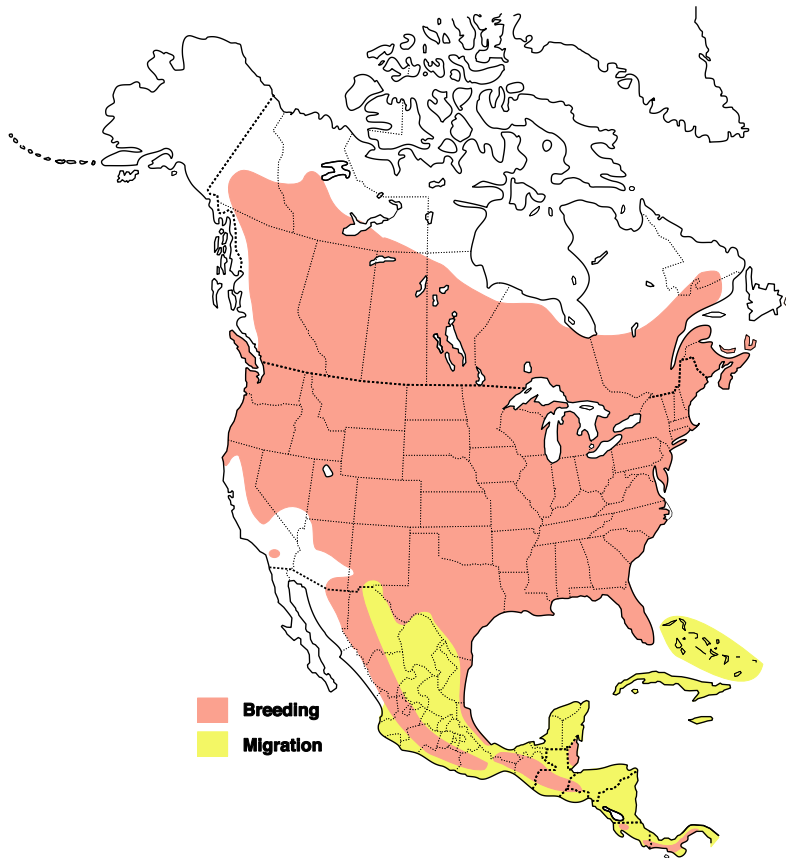


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Range map credit: “Birds of North America” <https://birdsna.org> maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY

Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

- Nighthawks have declined in urban areas due to gravel rooftops being replaced by tar, a far less suitable nesting substrate.
- Researchers have recently confirmed large populations in Canada’s northern forests.
- These new population data suggest there may be more nighthawks than previously thought.
- Nighthawks are difficult to detect on multi-species bird surveys because they are most active in the evening, and most other birds are active in the morning.
- Due to surveying difficulty, nighthawk population estimates have low precision.
- A national survey protocol was developed in 2016 to increase estimate precision.
- This population information is critical to know how quickly nighthawks are disappearing and where they need protection the most.

Get involved

- Find out more about volunteering for surveys [here](#).
- Read the recovery strategy for Common Nighthawks [here](#).